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AUTHOR Hayward, Louise; Riach, Christine; Reid, Myra
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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to help staff working in a range of early childhood settings to assess the progress of children from 3 to 5 years, particularly those working with "A Curriculum Framework for Children in the Pre-School Year" issued by the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department. Following an introduction, the guide is presented in five parts, each organized in a similar way to offer: (1) key ideas regarding the topic; (2) advice to help staff put ideas into practice; (3) comments from staff describing their approaches; (4) questions to help staff review their present practices; and (5) practical examples. The five chapters detailing each step in the assessment cycle are: (1) "Planning for Effective Learning," including samples of plans related to each area of development and learning; (2) "Observing and Assessing during Staff Interaction," including suggestions for improving observation skills; (3) "Recording: Summarising Success and Progress," including daily recording of observations and portfolio assessments; (4) "Reporting To Promote Partnerships," including suggestions for involving children and parents in reporting and managing transitions from the nursery to the primary school; and (5) "Evaluating: The Heart of Effective Learning," focusing on the use of reflection to improve learning and teaching. (KB)

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EARLY EDUCATION SUPPORT

# Promoting Learning:

## Assessing Children's Progress 3 to 5

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# Promoting Learning:

## Assessing Children's Progress 3 to 5

First published 1998

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Louise Hayward - St. Andrew's College
Christine Riach - Dundee City Council
Myra Reid - East Renfewshire Council

The authors would like to thank the many teachers, schools and education authority representatives for their helpful comments.

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Few tasks are more important than promoting learning for children in their early years. Children who begin their education in a supportive and challenging environment are likely to become confident and successful learners. Such learning environments do not simply happen: they emerge over time as the result of people working together, thinking carefully about children, about learning, and about the learning environment.

*A Curriculum Framework for Children in the Pre-school Year* (Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, 1997) provides a framework of learning experiences which will promote each child's development and learning in:

- Emotional, Personal and Social Development (EPSD)
- Communication and Language (CL)
- Knowledge and Understanding of the World (KUW)
- Expressive and Aesthetic Development (AED)
- Physical Development and Movement (PDM).

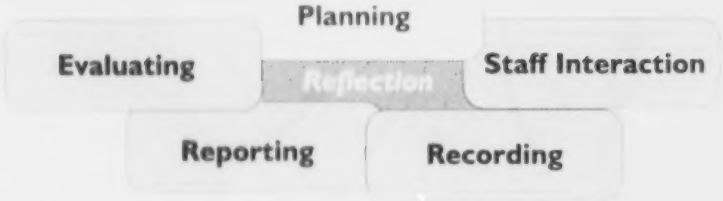
This booklet is designed to help staff working in a range of contexts to assess children's progress 3–5. It is aimed to support those working with the curriculum framework. It is based on the principles that:

- children's learning is promoted through planning, observing and interacting with children during play
- assessment is an integral part of learning and teaching
- the development of manageable and effective assessment practices involves teamwork by staff and parents
- children's learning is enhanced when staff reflect on learning.

Each of the five main sections of the booklet is organised in a similar way to offer:

- key ideas (on planning, staff interaction, recording, reporting or evaluating)
- advice which will help staff to put these ideas into practice
- comments from staff which describe their approaches
- questions to help staff to review their present practice
- practical examples.

Over the course of a year, staff will help children to develop in each of the key areas of the curriculum framework. They will interact with them to identify their progress and share observations with parents and other staff. They will **plan**, **interact**, **record**, **report** and **evaluate** learning and teaching (the assessment cycle).




Effective planning is central to effective learning for children. It is also the key to making learning and teaching manageable.

Planning will be most effective when it:

- sets out clear expectations to support children's learning
- enables staff to focus their involvement on effective learning and teaching
- uses the insight and experiences of staff
- involves children, reflecting their ideas, valuing their individuality
- involves parents
- is directly linked with assessment, celebrating children's learning and achievements, and looks forward to the next steps in learning.

Planning should promote children's learning. It should also be manageable for staff within the day-to-day demands of the nursery or centre. To achieve this in practice involves both long- and short-term planning.

## 2.1 LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM PLANNING

A **long-term plan** provides an overview of learning opportunities to be offered over the session and indicates areas of emphasis for learning during particular terms. A long-term plan helps to make learning and teaching manageable, recognising that it is neither possible nor desirable to try to teach or assess everything all of the time.



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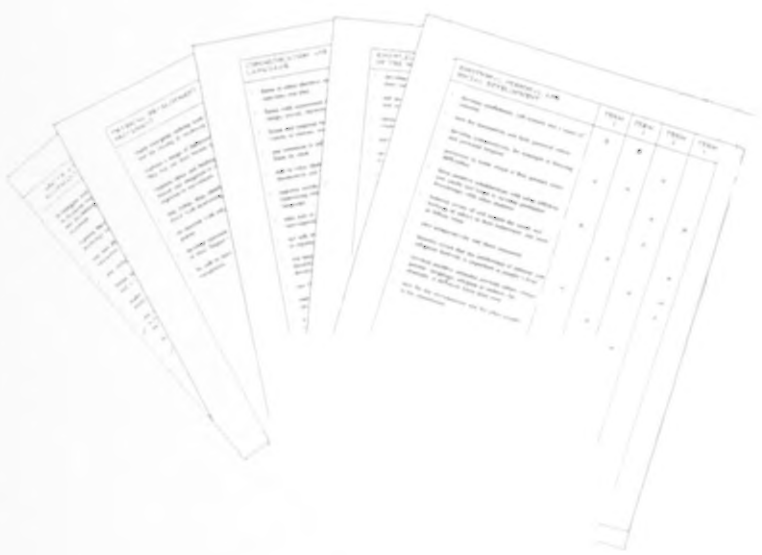
Long-term planning should:

- ensure that children have a wide range of learning opportunities
- plan time for festivals and seasonal themes
- prepare for interests or events which usually emerge during a year, such as a new baby, a hospital visit or ladybirds.

We plan for the year in our long-term plan. This plan shows very broadly how we will put into practice the curriculum framework. We also map out our interests and the main festivals and seasonal events which occur over the year. These are a way of linking the learning opportunities we plan in an interesting way for the children. Our staff like to know when these events are planned so that they can begin to gather resources and think about activities. It really comes to life when we translate it into short-term plans – and the children are at the heart of our short-term plans.

The long-term plan below shows a simple way of using the curriculum framework to plan which key aspects of children's development and learning will be given attention at various times during the year. It also shows how planning can prompt staff to begin to gather potentially useful resources.

Having resources on hand allows us to capture children's curiosity and build on it. Capturing the moment when the snow falls, the snowy day box would have poems, books, gloves, spades, etc., ready to pick up the enthusiasm of the children and channel it into learning.





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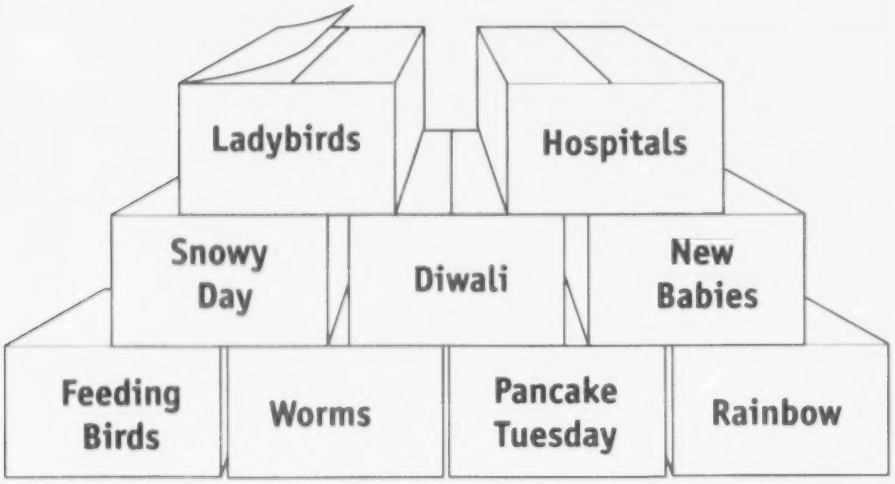


**Possible interests**

| August–October | October–December | January–March | March–June |
|---|---|---|---|
| Autumn | Diwali | Book topic – fairy tales | Gardening and planting |
| Harvest | Light and dark | Spring – new beginnings | Visiting |
| Fruits and seeds | Christmas | | |

A **short-term plan** (for 4–6 weeks) should:

- build on information about children's previous learning (column A in the table below)
- set out clearly what staff intend children to learn (referring to the curriculum framework (B))
- identify how individuals and the staff team will support learning during group activities and free play (C)
- show where observation and assessment will be focused (D)
- give staff an opportunity to evaluate aspects which were particularly successful or those which need more attention (E).

### Extract from short-term plan

| Previous learning | Main emphasis and expectation for children's learning | Support for learning | Observation focus | Evaluation of children's learning |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Most children enjoy listening to stories, but AM, DG, SS, LH are shy and need more confidence in talking about the stories to other children | Emotional, Personal and Social Development: develop confidence and self-esteem, particularly in listening and and talking situations | Provide puppets in the book corner:<br>• tell simple familiar stories with puppets<br>• support children using the puppets in the book corner – individually and in groups | • listen for developing confidence, willingness to interact<br>• listen for sequence and extended language as children use puppets to tell stories | • puppets particularly effective in helping Ann, Marie and Darren to talk to others |
| A | B | C | D | E |

Some staff prefer to prepare a short-term plan for about six weeks ahead and use a daily diary to adjust their plans on a day-to-day basis. Others make a less detailed outline plan for 4–6 weeks but supplement this with a weekly plan. (Examples illustrating each approach are included in Section 2.4.)

We make an outline plan for about six weeks (see page 9). The outline plan includes:

- aspects of the curriculum
- our observation focus
- how staff will support learning (staff/child interaction)
- our evaluation of the previous plan and areas for development within the next plan.

Each overview plan is then supported by a weekly plan (see page 11). This is discussed in our weekly planning meetings and includes our plans for:

- building on previous learning, including action for specific children
- support for learning
  - starting points
  - main learning and teaching expectations
  - activities for staff involvement, including small group times.

At the end of each week we spend a few minutes evaluating the plan and setting down some pointers for the next week.

All staff have notebooks in which they prepare for each day. These are discussed in daily meetings when each team discusses children's progress, involvement in activities, assessment and plans for the next day.

Our short-term plan (see page 5) is about practice in the playroom for the next 4–6 weeks. We use the curriculum framework and information from parents, children and our own observations of their previous learning to identify our expectations for children's learning in the next few weeks. We then share this information in informal discussions with parents and children.

Next we create a range of experiences to support the learning, highlighting:

- our teaching approaches and opportunities for sensitive adult interaction
- our responsibilities in general and with particular children
- our main resources.

Now we determine our focus for observation. To keep assessment manageable we try to choose a few significant aspects of learning to observe systematically.

We use an evaluation column in our plan to record incidents where what happened in the playroom was different from our expectations. When this happens we think about possible reasons and make any changes needed in our support for learning.

By planning in more detail for a block, we find that the only additional plans that we need are our day-to-day notes. We also keep a room diary to share information with all staff working in a playroom.

The following comment reminds us that unplanned and spontaneous learning is common with young children and when this is observed it should be taken into account in making future plans.

We know that the learning we plan is only a part of the picture. Actually the children often adapt what we plan for their own purposes and sometimes they surprise us by showing us evidence of very effective learning at times we least expect.

Where children have special educational needs, individualised educational programmes should address their particular needs.

**Special educational needs**

| Previous learning interests | Main emphasis and expectations for children's learning | Interaction in learning | Observation focus | Evaluation of children's learning/action needed |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Donald seldom plays or joins other group situations | Emotional, Personal and Social Development: help Donald develop friendships with other children | • tutor Donald in approaching groups: giving appropriate language<br>• praise successes<br>• tell stories related to friendships | note instances when Donald joins groups | • becoming more confident as he approaches groups<br>• encourage other children to involve Donald in their play |





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## 2.2 PARTNERSHIP IN PLANNING

Planning is likely to be more effective if it involves:

- staff
- children
- parents.

### Involving staff

> We plan as a team. I can't see how it could work any other way. Quite often we find that we know different things about different children and all the information coming together provides us with a more complete picture of the children for our planning.

When staff work together as a team, their ideas and observations about children feed easily into the planning process. Much valuable information circulates orally through discussion and less has to be written down. In addition, staff become committed to making their plans work in practice.

### Involving children

Children will not be present during planning meetings but they certainly influence the planning process. Their current needs and achievements will be taken into account in making plans for their progress. Staff will also bring ideas from conversations with children about their current interests and types of activity that they are enjoying.

> Recently we have started to involve the children much more in our planning, asking them what they enjoyed and what they did not enjoy. They were really interesting. We asked a group if they liked listening to stories in the story corner. Some did and some didn't, but when we asked why, their reasons were fascinating. Samir liked sitting on the floor on the big cushions and enjoyed stories about animals. Lynne found it hard to listen when children in other areas were doing other things. She made us begin to think about the effect of noise on children's listening and to plan to deal with that.

### Involving parents

Where there are regular contacts with parents, staff will be able to take account of significant comments and contributions from parents in planning, for example:

- comments about particular children, such as emotional upsets, interests in books taken home to share with parents
- contributions from parents who have offered to help with activities.

> We are setting up a Post Office corner and George's dad has volunteered to talk to the children about working in the post office.

## 2.3 REFLECTION: HOW GOOD IS OUR PLANNING?

> Once we have completed our plans we tend to stand back and take a long hard look at them. Sometimes I've found that I become so involved in the planning itself that I need some time to think about whether the completed plan is actually likely to achieve what I had intended it to when I began to plan. It doesn't take long, but it is helpful.

Staff should think about the quality of the planning process in their own centre. As a group, they should discuss the following questions to identify the strengths of their system of planning and areas that need development.

- Do we have a long-term plan which provides an overview of learning opportunities to be offered over the year, with particular areas of emphasis for learning identified for each term?
  - Does it ensure that children have a wide range of learning opportunities over a year?
  - Does it plan time for festivals and seasonal themes?
  - Does it prepare for possible child-initiated learning, for example by creating resource boxes for topics which tend to interest children every year, such as a road safety visit or a snowy day?
  - Does it help make learning and teaching manageable?
- Do we have a short-term plan which provides a framework for learning in the areas of emphasis identified in the long-term plan?
  - Does it build on information about children's previous learning?
  - Does it set out clearly what staff intend children to learn (referring to the curriculum framework)?
  - Does it identify how individuals and the staff team will support learning during group activities and free play?
  - Does it show where observation and assessment will be focused?
  - Does it give staff an opportunity to evaluate aspects which were particularly successful or those which need more attention?
- How do we ensure that staff, children and parents are involved in planning?
  - Do staff share in the planning process?
  - Have we taken account of children's comments and information from parents during planning?
  - Have we built in opportunities to share our plans with children and parents?
- Are our plans working?
  - Is the nursery stimulating and well organised?
  - Are the children responding well and making good progress?
  - Are the resources we are using providing the learning opportunities that we want?

## 2.4 EXAMPLES OF SHORT-TERM PLANS

### Two approaches to short-term planning

Some staff prefer to prepare a short-term plan for about six weeks ahead and use a daily diary to adjust their plans on a day-to-day basis. Others make a less detailed outline plan for 4–6 weeks but supplement this with a weekly plan.

## (1) Outline plan plus weekly plan

### *Outline plan*

| Curriculum aspect | Assessment focus |
|---|---|
| Emotional, Personal and Social Development | *co-operative play and sharing resources*<br>*perseverance in tasks promote positive attitudes* |
| Communication and Language | *use books to find interesting information*<br>*listen with enjoyment and respond to music, stories, songs, etc*<br>*use talk and role play, experiment with symbols/letters* |
| Knowledge and Understanding of the World | *changes and effects of weather, mathematical language in garden, wonder at nature, ask questions, experiment, design and solve problems, winter vocabulary and snow* |
| Expressive and Aesthetic Development | *expressive painting, responding to sounds and rhythms, playing percussion instruments more rhythmically and expressively to music* |
| Physical Development and Movement | *co-operate with others in physical play and games* |

**Staff–child interaction**

*Spend time in home area, talking, reflecting, encouraging role play. Talking about interest tables on shapes and weather.*
*Use specific listening games at small group time.*
*Offer focus for language – discuss properties – encourage counting. Draw attention to plant names and garden vocabulary.*
*Promote careful handling of books, raise awareness of print. Show display.*
*Dual language books. Library visits. Snow, ice and cold weather; describe and discuss effects of. Talk to children about expressive works – encourage observation skills in painting, "The Winter Ben". Chinese Cafe – Mrs Chann – talking about tastes – vocabulary 'hot', 'spicy'.*
*Set up physical play activities indoors – obstacle courses, 'follow my leader'.*

**Resources**

*Home area – Games and puzzles – Tape and listening activities.*
*Books – Dual language – Winter, garden themes, fact finding. Computer games – Sand, water, small worlds and plants, posters and photos.*

**Evaluation**

*Jane and Claire progressed easily through number games. Language assessments show everyone has basic social language. Reference books used and enjoyed by most children – library visits successful. Children want to go back for more books. Photographs and videos of displays show good understanding and language.*

**Development points**

*Introduce different cultural music and more movement activities.*
*Extend and develop understanding of shape and sequencing. More resources and ideas for problem solving and experimenting.*
*Buy a CD ROM with information about animals in the winter.*

## Weekly plan

**Building on previous learning**

*Children enjoying energetic play, staff to encourage outdoor activity.*
*Most children using computer – Sean, Main and Tammy needing more confidence.*
*Continue to support younger children in independent and self-help skills.*

**Action for specific children**

*Zoe – still unsettled, needing lots of reassurance.*
*Tasween – assess social language, seems very isolated. James/Amy/Cameron – continue to encourage eye contact and develop listening skills.*
*Extend Daniel/Hiba's number skills, especially ordering.*

**Supporting Learning**
**Starting points**

*The children are enjoying the tastes of Chinese food. Mrs Chann has been in to open her 'Chinese Restaurant' and she is very popular! We are seeing some good emergent writing in the cafe – and Luke and Danielle have been trying the Chinese characters.*

*Children are enjoying stories – Mrs Chann has had many tales to tell. Mrs Isang is to cook a stirfry on Tuesday.*

**Key activities and staff involvement**

*Chinese Restaurant – senses, use of equipment, appreciation and knowledge of Chinese culture.*

*Role play in the restaurant.*

*Display – Chinese articles, books and pictures.*
*Mathematics – snowflake pictures using shape names and describing properties.*
*Painting – snowy pictures.*

**Main learning and teaching expectations**

| | |
|---|---|
| EPSD – | *celebration, awareness of Chinese culture* |
| CL – | *encouraging listening and talking in play* |
| EAD – | *expressive painting, writing activities, responding to sounds and rhythms* |
| KUW – | *properties of snow, melting, language, questioning skills* |
| PDM – | *movement/music, writing weather movements* |

*Small group time.*
*Drama and role play and work with puppets.*
*Familiar stories.*
*Water Tray – bring snow into water tray – hot, cold, melting, frozen, thaw. Experiments to show melting and freezing.*
*Snack/Baking – tasting, sampling, preparing a variety of Chinese food. Use chopsticks.*
*Outdoor – snow – warm clothes.*

**Evaluation**

*Children co-operating and playing well in Chinese Restaurant. Daniel and Hiba both progressing well in number games. John R has enjoyed being the chef – this will support his confidence and social development. We will need to display more words in different languages and characters. Books well used. The recipe cards for 'Rice Balls' have been well used to demonstrate sequencing.*

**Development points**

*Continue Chinese Cafe – look at food from other cultures too (Eid), and Scotch Broth. Display words in different languages and characters. Change display re 'hot, cold'. Move small world resources into Water Tray.*



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| Previous Learning | Main Emphasis and Expectations for Children's Learning |
|---|---|
| Children enjoyed the story of 'You Will Soon Grow Into Them, Titch'.<br><br>Good interesting discussions about changes in the 'seeds' illustration helped.<br><br>GB, JJ, BT, SJ, RB, SD recall collecting and saving fruits and seeds last autumn. | **EPSD**<br>Awareness of needs of plants.<br><br>**CL**<br>use language to question, predict, explain, describe.<br>Use books to find interesting information.<br><br>**KUW**<br>Develop powers of observation using senses.<br>Be aware of seasonal changes and the effect on weather, and animals. |
| Curiosity and investigative skills were nurtured last autumn when:<br>• children planted bulbs in the garden and outdoors<br>• seeds were collected from sunflowers and fruits.<br><br>A connection to this was made with the recent interest in the story about changes. | **KUW**<br>Develop an appreciation of natural beauty, and sense of wonder about the world.<br><br>Sort and categorise materials.<br><br>**EAD**<br>Express thoughts and feelings in pictures, paintings and models.<br>Investigate and use a variety of media. |
| • Most children enjoy listening to stories but AM, DG, SS, CH are younger and are still shy when asked to talk about the stories to the other children.<br>• Children enjoyed recent focus on nursery rhymes. Will build on this to help them hear and isolate sounds.<br>• JJ, SJ, HS, JD, DG like listening to tapes of stories.<br>• Observed little involvement by the children in the music corner.<br>• S finds it difficult to share, particularly at sand. | **EPSD**<br>Develop confidence and self esteem, particularly in listening and talking situations.<br><br>**CL**<br>Become aware of everyday uses of technology – cassette recorder – and use appropriately.<br><br>**EAD**<br>Listen and respond to sounds, rhythms and use instruments by themselves to invent music.<br><br>**EPSD**<br>Taking turns and sharing. |



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| Support for Learning | Observation Focus | Evaluation of Children's Learning |
|---|---|---|
| Planting seeds, including the seeds saved from autumn.<br>Variety of seeds, some fast growing, some requiring propagation.<br>Selection of different sizes of seeds.<br>Indoors: plant seeds / read planting book / sort seeds / drawings of planting<br>Outdoors: as above.<br>Encourage and sustain children's curiosity. | Record use of language.<br>Analyse type of language used.<br>Note significant achievement in profile. | A few children remembered we had saved the seeds. The daily care of plants was effective. Stories and songs reinforced this. Some seedlings planted out in the garden in May. Children getting involved now aware of stages in growing process. |
| Set up attractive planting area to encourage children to become involved in planting by themselves. (Adult on register will provide support in this area when required.) | Photograph children using reference books. | Displays helped stimulate interest and discussion among children, and with families. |
| Add play farm to the play with animals, adult and young, to promote talk about farms in preparation for farm visit. Visit to farm.<br>(Adult act as role model in using reference books about farms.) | Use photographs to assist children in talking about their observations. | Photographs of farm sustained conversations. |
| Display of buds and flowers from our garden on snack table.<br>• talk with children at snack table during free play. | Observe children's responses to displays and changes as they occur in nature.<br><br>Is curiosity developing? | Most children were very observant and enthusiastic. |
| Display of bulbs planted in autumn.<br>• various displays of flowers complemented with appropriate books, including home made books.<br>• talk about reference books and use contents page wherever possible. | Analyse children's paintings – are they expressive? | Particular children were identified who needed support and encouragement. |
| Small group outings throughout the season to the farm.<br>• arrange with parents to create a 'treasure hunt' sheet, to focus observation.<br>• bring back appropriate items and photos to add to display.<br>• questions to promote curiosity – share with parents. | | The children who chose to paint 'still life' of flowers were really pleased with their paintings. Showed good involvement in the task. Try more media. |
| Sort seeds/natural materials.<br>• at group time, talk about 'the same as', 'not the same'. | | |
| Experiences to include easel painting, 'still life'.<br>• adults to display cards of artists' paintings of flowers, and talk about shape and colour. | | |
| Collage with real materials, such as blossom, seeds, twigs. | | |
| Provide puppets in the book corner.<br>• tell simple familiar stories with puppets.<br>• support children using the puppets in the book corner individually and in groups. AM, DG, SS, CH. | Analyse photographs. | Puppets particularly effective in helping AM, MG, DG to talk to others. |
| Provide and use stories with rhyme and alliteration – use listening tapes too.<br>• encourage children to join in and spot rhymes.<br>• tap out children's names with different media. | Photograph children telling stories. | Most children enjoying rhymes, but children having difficulty hearing rhymes. |
| Develop and extend nursery rhyme displays.<br>• staff take turns weekly to set up with children.<br>• involve parents in nursery rhyme focus. | Continue to record on tape children reciting number rhymes. | Children are beginning to use the music area creatively, inventing music. Still needs lots of adult |
| **Group time**<br>1. Experiment and investigate sounds.<br>2. Matching sounds.<br>3. Sound walk.<br>4. Odd one out, and other listening games. | Note children who can hear 'odd one out' word. | |
| Develop music area with focus on inventing music.<br>• Joan – support at music area till children independent.<br>• build up daily, starting with one instrument, talk about instruments at 'together time'. | Video music corner in four weeks' time, to analyse learning. | |
| Spend time with S at sand. Limit numbers if possible and encourage sharing.<br>Provide language for sharing. | E to observe S. | |



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## Diary

12/05/98 – morning session

Craig's Birthday! Jane (adult) will help to make his birthday cake. Encourage Craig to follow recipe book independently. We will have a celebration at 'gathering together' time.

Add to Jay's profile

*Craig, Sandy, Kyle and Jay followed recipe well. Found ingredients by themselves. Craig had a birthday celebration with lots of fun.*

*Jay did not lose interest and was very involved in making Craig's birthday cake.*

### Book corner

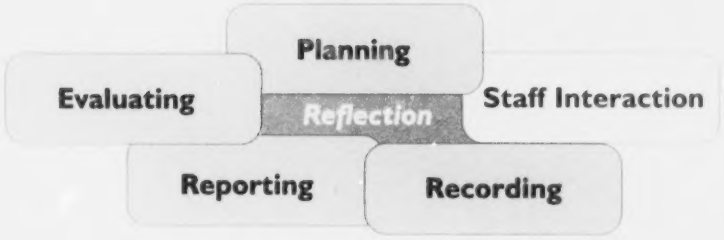
- Build on Kerr's new interest in the puppets. Angela (student) will encourage Kerr and Andrew to use the puppets to talk and will try reciting nursery rhymes with them.
- Develop interest in Pat Hutchins as author, and Craig's birthday with the *Happy Birthday Sam* story.

### Writing area

- Add selection of birthday cards to the writing area. Encourage children to give ideas on how to make a card for Craig.

### Group time

- Playing with names and finding rhymes — Jane
  Odd one out … sound — Sheila
  (Sheila will observe and record children's reactions. Angela will support this group and help record as well. )
- Sound lotto — Marion
- Matching sounds – containers — Leslie




### Getting to know each child

When staff interact with children or take time to stand back and observe their play, they can gather important information about each child's development and learning. This information is the cornerstone of assessment in nursery centres.

Good assessment of children's learning is based on day-to-day observation and interaction. This builds up knowledge over time and in a range of situations. It recognises:

- the child as a person and how to build a relationship of trust and respect
- the child's progress in each key aspect of the curriculum
- the child's interests, motivation and preferred ways of learning
- the kinds of questions to ask which will encourage the child to share ideas and develop thinking
- when to step back, to encourage independence.

You will get to know each child well and identify significant progress very readily. Your knowledge of the child will enable you to judge when additional support, experience or challenge is required.

**The purpose of assessment through observation and interaction is therefore to build up a knowledge and understanding of the child. The child's own experience, perceptions, interests and ways of learning are the crucial basis for her/his growth as a person.**

## 3.1 WHAT TO OBSERVE

In the course of a morning or afternoon session, children will play in a range of situations. They will interact with other children and with adults and will come together in groups and adult-led activities. Given all of this activity, observation has to be selective and focused for particular purposes.

> It is pointless to try to gather pages of description of a child's every move because you won't be able to use the information. We agree a focus for assessment each week within our planning discussions. This way we know what information we need and can concentrate on that. We also target six children every week to observe their progress carefully. This means that we take a close look at every child on a regular basis.

At different times, observation and assessment might be focused on, for example,

- how children respond to the play environment:
  - what they choose to do
  - who they play with or talk to
  - the level of adult support needed
  - their level of involvement in play
  - the range of play experiences over a day or a week



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- whether particular learning goals for an individual or small group of children have been achieved, for example can they climb and balance well, do they use books for enjoyment or to find interesting information?
- children's significant achievement in a particular aspect of the curriculum.

Staff then have to decide which observations lead to action **so that observation influences what staff do and improves the quality of learning.**

> Rosie enjoyed painting pictures to take home. We had noticed that, although she was painting more and more, her pictures were becoming less and less expressive. Mrs S stayed with her in the painting area and asked what she wanted to paint. Rosie, after some hesitation, said, 'My house'. They talked about Rosie's house and what it looked like and then Rosie began to paint. Mrs S asked what Rosie's mum did with all her paintings. Rosie said, 'She hangs them in the kitchen.' Mrs S suggested that they should pick a special picture for the wall and that Rosie could paint some pictures and decide which one to choose. Rosie thought that was a good idea. Mrs S, Rosie and her mum had a chat about the paintings and which one to take home. Over a period of time Mrs S went to the painting area with Rosie to support the development of her painting.

## 3.2 TO WRITE OR NOT TO WRITE: THAT IS THE QUESTION

Writing down notes from observation reduces the time for other work with children. It is important, therefore, that written notes are used selectively and that staff make sure that their notes on observation are useful – that is, they are used in building up a picture of the child and used in planning.

The best time to make a brief note is often right 'on the spot'. Staff can use notebooks or sticky labels to make a note and these notes can then be dated and placed in the child's profile. Staff can easily check that they are gathering information about each child – it is easy to spot which profile has a number of entries and which has very few!

Information about children can be obtained from a variety of sources, including:

- children and parents
- photographs, video or tape recordings
- samples of children's work
- observation records
- notebooks or diaries.

More information on how these sources might be used to form records of children's progress can be found in the next section on Recording.

## 3.3 IMPROVING OBSERVATION SKILLS

Staff can work together to build up their observation skills. The following steps may help.

- With a partner, agree a series of observation tasks. For example, focus on:
  - a particular child
  - an aspect of learning identified in your plan or from the curriculum framework
  - an area of the playroom.



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- Discuss how you will gather the information. For example, will you:
  - observe without interacting
  - encourage the children to talk about their learning (concentrate on listening to them – it can be the most important way of helping them to learn!)
  - ask children open questions which make them think, for example, 'What made you choose this book?' 'Tell me how you built this castle?'
  - ask children to carry out a task, or solve a problem, or play with a particular resource
  - take notes, use a checklist, photographs, tape recorder, video?
- Gather the information. Think about:
  - what you see and note down
  - what other evidence you might want to gather
  - what you would plan to do next, for example, to support the child.
- Share ideas by:
  - discussing your observations in pairs
  - reporting your findings to the team to share a wider range of perspectives.

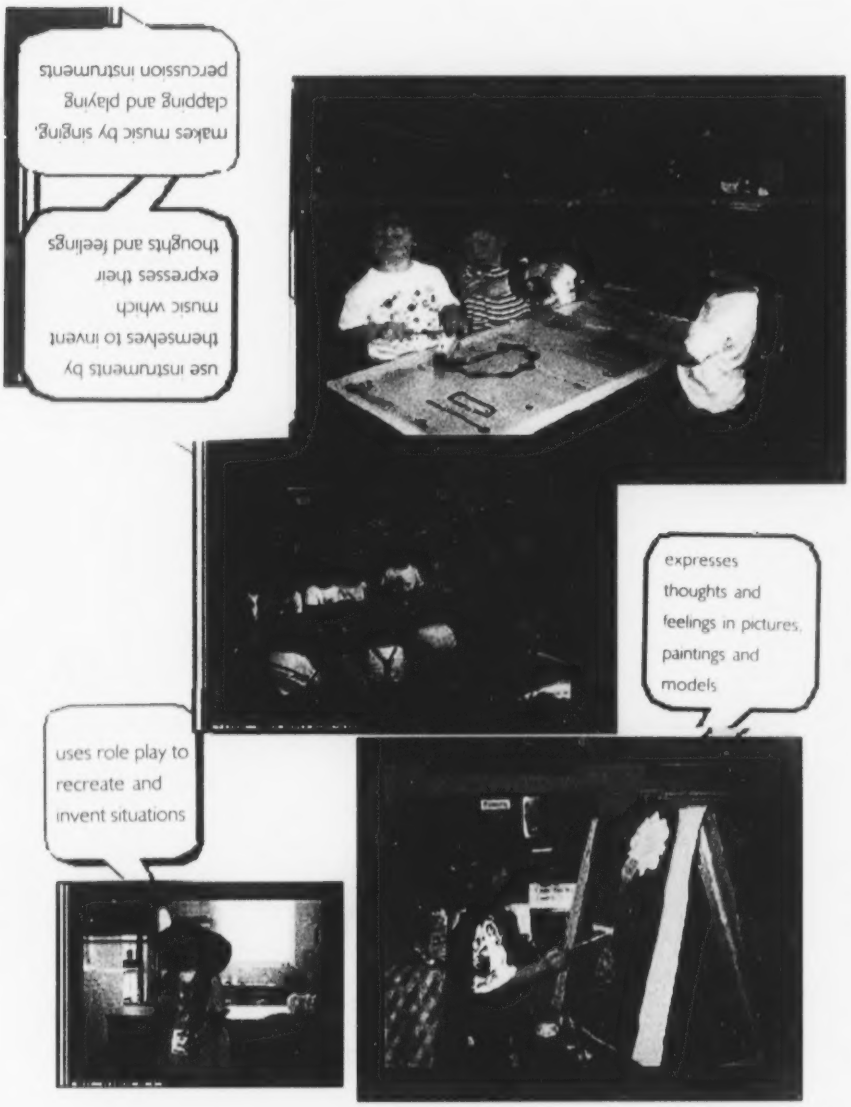
> We talk about the children in our daily planning meeting. We may ask for help in supporting a particular child. Often one of us has a 'hunch' about one of the children and discovers that someone else has had the same thought. Sometimes a different view causes us to think again. This happened last week when one of us said she had noticed that Robert was very quiet and she wondered if he was bored. One of the other staff had had a chance discussion with Robert's mum who told her that he was tired because they had had a house full of visitors and he had not been settling until late at night.

The example on page 18 shows children involved in aspects of expressive and aesthetic development. This might lead to observations and the identification of other sources of evidence needed to make judgements about children's progress.

The example on page 19 illustrates staff's thoughts as they focus their observation on a particular child in a particular aspect of learning. It also shows how information from parents can be used to supplement evidence from staff observation.

## Examples of observation

### (1) *Observing expressive and aesthetic development*


makes music by singing, clapping and playing percussion instruments
use instruments by themselves to invent music which expresses their thoughts and feelings
expresses thoughts and feelings in pictures, paintings and models
uses role play to recreate and invent situations

### *(2) Focused observation – emerging reading*

In a discussion between Malcolm, his parent and staff the following points were raised.

What are Malcolm's achievements as an early reader?

I like stories with animal pictures

**Staff's comments**
Looks at books on own

**Staff's comments**
Recognises some letters of the alphabet

**Parent's comments**
Frequently asks for stories. Knows stories off by heart

**Staff's comments**
Aware of words, letters, sentences

**Staff's comments**
Knows and understands illustrations

**Parent's comments**
He was given a book by his Gran about Noah's Ark Malcolm had this book in nursery and wanted to compare the illustrations in the two books page by page

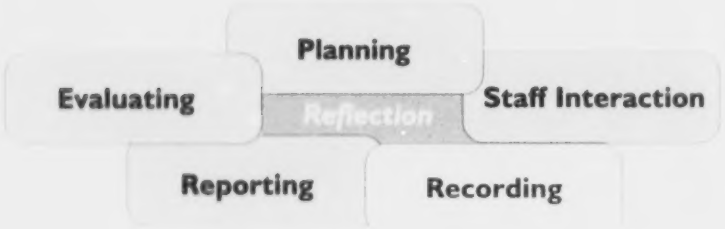
**Staff's comments**
There is a group of four boys who spark ideas and set problems for themselves and each other. The staff are always running to keep ahead of them with our planning. Malcolm is one of them

What should be written about this discussion?
What might be the next steps?

## 3.4 REFLECTION: HOW GOOD IS OUR OBSERVATION?

Staff should think about the quality of their observation. If they are confident that they can answer 'yes' to the following questions, then their observation practice should be in good shape.

- Do we observe for a range of purposes?
  - Do we sometimes focus on how children are responding to an area of the playroom?
  - Do we sometimes take a close look at a particular child?
  - Do we often gather information about an aspect of learning set out in our plans?
- When we observe, are we clear about the purpose of the observation?
- When we make a significant observation do we use it:
  - to take immediate action, for example to provide support or challenge?
  - to include in our records?
  - to inform planning?
  - to talk to children about their learning and progress?
- Do we have good arrangements for sharing observations?




Staff usually get to know children very well and can often talk knowledgeably about them. They observe children regularly and keep detailed information about the children in their heads. Some of this evidence should be used to build up a record of children's achievements and progress and to plan the next steps in learning. This record will also provide a good basis for discussions with children and staff and for reporting to parents and other agencies.

It is easy to record too much information in an attempt to cover everything: too detailed record keeping takes time away from interacting with children in learning and teaching. Effective recording involves selecting significant information about the child's learning and progress.

Recording therefore requires to be:

- manageable – within the everyday routines of the nursery
- useful – for planning the next steps and reporting
- selective – to record only what is significant.

## 4.1 RECORDING: THE KEY PRINCIPLES

### Key purposes of recording

Recording will serve key purposes:

- to develop a profile of each child's progress over time in each of the key aspects of development and learning
- as a prompt to staff to take some action, for example to develop an activity further over the next few days or to plan next steps for learning and teaching over a longer period
- to support learning and teaching by encouraging teamwork and sharing success with staff, parents and children, motivating them and developing their sense of self-worth.

### The focus of recording

Observation and recording should focus on:

- the priorities for learning which have been identified at the planning stage
- other significant aspects which emerge which staff observe during play, for example where a child or group of children demonstrate an interest, a skill or need for support in an aspect which was not included in the current plan
- gaps in information needed about a child, for example, if a profile shows that little is known about the child's interests or skills in music making.



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### Partnership in recording

Recording is a whole-staff responsibility. All staff who are involved in observing and interacting with children should contribute ideas and information to records and profiles. However, different staff may have different responsibilities within this process.

All staff should record in partnership with each other and with parents. Children should also be involved in recording.

### Using evidence in recording

Recording should be based on evidence, which may include:

- notes of observation
- photographs and examples of children's work
- information from children and parents.

Some very effective records are kept in notebooks; others are kept on forms which are used by the whole team. Staff often use post-its to make 'on the spot' notes. Key information can then be transferred into individual profiles or folios.

### Recording over time

Staff should record:

- regularly over time (some nurseries or centres focus on each key aspect at two or three points in the year to track each child's progress; others build up records more gradually)
- when there is something significant to note, for example, when staff feel that a child has learned something new or gained in confidence or needs more practice with a skill
- on the spot or after discussion or reflection (this is partly a question of individual preference; some staff are happy to jot down notes on the spot, whilst others may prefer to wait for a quieter moment when they have had some time to think).

## 4.2 DAY-TO-DAY RECORDING OF OBSERVATIONS AND ASSESSMENTS

Much recording will take place during day-to-day activities with children. In addition the daily contact between staff and parents will provide information from discussions about individual children's progress.

> We keep individual profiles for each child, to show progress across the five key aspects of the curriculum. The profiles are built up over time and include information from everyday observations of the child, in addition to specific information gathered at particular times.
>
> We complete profiles from time to time when we have been looking in depth at one area of the curriculum. These tell us at a glance if we have gathered enough information about an individual child. The profiles are discussed at the weekly meetings so that we can plan for the needs and interests of individual children.
>
> Some of our staff prefer to jot down a quick note – we use stickies for this purpose and immediately stick these onto the child's file. We might also note a comment from a parent or something the child has said. These notes can then be used in writing up the child's profile when there is more time.

Jamie's mum said he gets asthma when the oilseed rape is in bloom.

Jamie spent 35 minutes building a rocket. He asked for some help in making a pointed end. He is very good at designing and making vehicles and machines.

## Information from parents

Parents often make comments about their children's learning which staff will set alongside their own assessments. Staff should read the following comments and decide whether they might make a note of any of the comments and, if so, how they might follow them up.



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Henry talks a lot about the stories he is reading at nursery. Last weekend we has to go to the library to find a 'Percy' book. He can tell me about the authors he likes too. He says he wants to be an author when he is older.

Our house can be a bit crowded at times. Sean loves to be alone, when he can get some peace and quiet. He potters away with his toys. Unfortunately he doesn't get many chances for this.

Marie loves to write at home. She can use real words.

I hear a great deal about Jenni's friendships. Sometimes she seems really upset by something that's happened. The other day she said that another child had said she wouldn't play with her because she couldn't run fast. Other days she is really happy. How can I best support her?

**Taking a closer look at individual children**

Day-to-day observations will provide much of the information needed for record keeping. Staff will also include information gathered by taking a closer look at an aspect of each child's learning, for example, making a note on each child's skills in physical play or on understanding of number. They may create a play context or particular activity designed to gather this evidence. They will also seek out additional information about an aspect of learning for a child or group of children where profiles show a gap.

Many nurseries take a closer look at all aspects of a child's learning over a period of time, targeting a small group of children each week. This is a useful way of reviewing a child's general progress.

We feel that our recording systems make it easy to see if we have not gathered enough information about a child in any curriculum area. If we notice this we can then focus more closely on that child over the next few days to make sure we fill in the gaps. We target children when something happens which suggests that we need to find out more. One example of this was when one of the staff heard Cameron reading to some other children in the story corner. We were able to watch him closely and found out that not only did he know the letter sounds, he had also begun to string them together and was reading words and sentences from simple texts. Our observations of this helped us to make sure that we gave Cameron plenty of opportunity and encouragement to demonstrate his achievement; it also made us look at the range of opportunities in the nursery to promote children's early reading.

**One way of recording progress in an aspect of the curriculum**

We were trying hard to link recording with our planning. It was important to make sure that we were recording evidence to ensure our plans were promoting the learning intended. We had an in-service day last month and we spent time discussing the learning we could all look for within communication and language, so that we had already thought about the potential learning we would aim to observe. We used the curriculum framework to draw up a simple one page list that we could use in our observation and recording. We know that you can't put learning in a box really, but we did find this was useful in helping us to focus our recordings. Because we were all involved in drawing it up, we all understand its purpose ... and its limitations!

## 4.3 FOLIOS

Building up a folio of achievement for each child is an effective way of gathering evidence to track a child's progress.

Decisions about what to put into the folio can involve:

- the child in discussion with staff about examples of her/his best work or items which are reminders of a favourite experience
- staff, who will wish to include items which demonstrate progress in aspects of learning, such as early and later pieces of emergent writing or a photograph of a model constructed over a few days
- parents, who may discuss with their child their preferences.

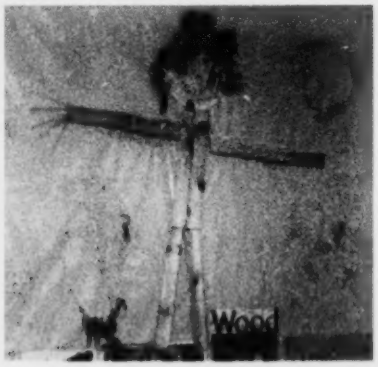
Staff can use folios to share information on children's progress with parents, other staff and the children themselves. The folio provides concrete examples of the child's work and dating the items will help to show progress over time. Photographs or samples of work can be accompanied by short comments which describe their significance and which act as a guide through the folio.

Folios need to be reviewed from time to time to consider whether there are too many items and more recent examples might better illustrate the child's current achievements. Each new item can be compared with earlier pieces. Involving children in this selection can increase their sense of responsibility for their own learning. Showing their folio to others and discussing what is in it will enhance their sense of pride and achievement.

The following quotations illustrate the kind of comments which accompany items included in folios:

Danielle's favourite story is *Rosie's Walk*. This picture was taken just after she had told the whole story to another girl, her friend Katy. 4/1/97

Ben and Eli made this wooden scarecrow.
Eli made the face, and Ben stuck the wooden pieces together.
Ben and Eli make lots of models together.
4/11/97




Here are Fiona, Elie and Narim playing at the frog pool.
There are some tadpoles just about to become frogs and Elie is always first to look in the morning to see if there are any changes.
5/5/97

We have a Folio Week when parents are invited to come into the nursery to review their child's folio. Before the Folio Week, staff work with the children to organise their folios, deciding which items to leave in and which to add and taking the opportunity to talk about and praise each child's achievements.

### Practical ways of organising folios

Folios can be stored in a variety of ways:

- large sugar paper folders (these are the simplest)
- box files for each child
- large see through pockets.

Organise the material in the folios in chronological order and date each item.

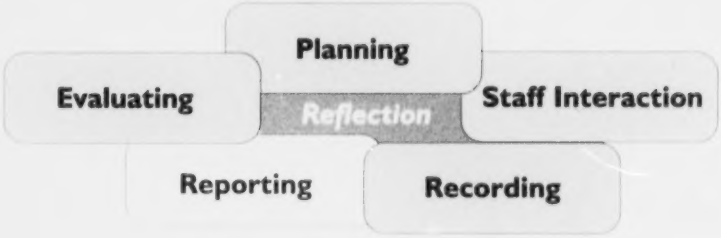
The material can also be organised according to the five curriculum aspects to show how the child has progressed within each aspect.
The folio may include:

- drawings with stories scribed by an adult
- examples of mark making or emergent writing
- a list of favourite books and stories
- known nursery rhymes
- photographs
- observation notes.

## 4.4 REFLECTION: HOW GOOD IS OUR RECORDING?

Staff should think about the quality of the recording process in their own centre. As a staff group, they should discuss the following questions to identify the strengths of their system of record keeping and areas that need development.

- Is our system of recording manageable for staff?
  - Does it lead to a profile of each child's progress over time in each of the key aspects of their development and learning?
  - Does it prompt staff to take action and influence plans?
  - Does it encourage teamwork and the sharing of success with staff, children and parents?
  - Does it focus on the priorities for learning set out in plans?
  - Does it combine evidence from:
    - day-to-day recording of observations and assessments
    - taking a closer look at individual children
    - parents?

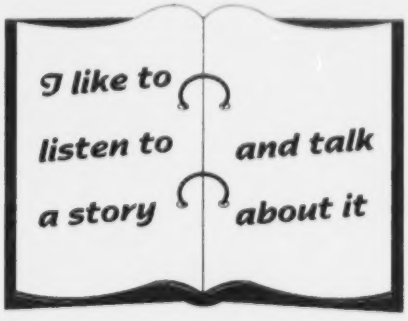



Effective reporting promotes collaboration among all the partners involved in a child's learning. It is also vital in providing useful feedback on a child's development and learning.

## 5.1 REPORTING INFORMALLY AND FORMALLY

Reporting starts when a child is preparing to enter the nursery or centre. Families are asked to consider the learning the child has already achieved

- to ensure that the child's strengths and interests are recognised
- to promote a dialogue between the home and the nursery or centre
- to encourage discussion about future approaches by all involved with the child.




Informal reporting to parents continues throughout the year through:

- ✔ day-to-day discussions
- sending home examples of children's work and photographs
- discussing displays of children's work
- discussing children's folios.

Formal reporting will take account of the evidence about the child's learning contained in the folio or profile and should encourage everyone involved to work together on the next steps for learning.

A formal report should:

- provide children, parents and primary schools (or the next centre) with a summary of the child's learning in each of the key aspects
- show that the writer has a good personal knowledge of the individual child as a learner
- emphasise the child's best achievement and encourage motivation by positive comment
- help staff plan the next steps in learning for the child.





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## 5.2 WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN REPORTING?

Reporting will be most effective when the process includes dialogue with

- the child
- parents
- staff from the nursery or centre
- other agencies where required
- primary staff.

### Involving children in reporting

> We talked about children being at the centre of our curriculum and, though they were involved in the assessment process on a day-to-day basis, we had not thought to involve them in reporting. We now add the child's comment to our report and encourage him or her to select a drawing to go with the report.

This involvement is useful in:

- celebrating a child's achievement
- giving a child feedback on her/his learning
- talking about what the child wants to achieve next.

> 'I'm going to primary school next and then I'll go to University.'
> (Mark, aged 4)

### Involving parents in reporting

> Our parents want to know how their child is getting on without their presence.

Parents will be able to participate more confidently in reporting if they are kept well informed about the work of the nursery and its curriculum (parent workshops, newsletters, bulletin boards and leaflets such as the SOEID/Scottish CCC parents' leaflet are useful here).

Staff can support parental involvement in reporting by:

- listening to parents' comments and views
- giving feedback in language which is clear and jargon free
- illustrating points made in the report, using examples of the child's work
- using the reports as an agenda for discussion at a nursery–parents interview
- encouraging discussion on steps that staff and parents can take to support future learning.

When children are starting school, parents may sometimes find it useful to refer to the nursery/centre report in discussion with their child's new teacher.

### Involving primary staff

> We found the most effective way of sharing information on children's progress is in face-to-face discussion. By talking together we could really share what the child is able to do and help the primary school to build from this prior learning. (Nursery staff)

Summarising a child's development and learning in a report and discussing that with primary colleagues will help primary teachers to identify appropriate starting points for their pupils.

> We find the nursery report with the child's photograph very useful. At the beginning of term we usually have an 'All About Me' topic, when the children are invited to bring their nursery folio and talk about their nursery work. This helps us to see where children are needing a lot of help or are ready to move on. (Primary One teacher)

## 5.3 REPORTING IN PRACTICE

In this section an early years practitioner talks about the steps leading up to a reporting meeting with parents.

> Taking the nursery report home comes at the end of a long process which begins when the child starts nursery.
>
> Our first step is to inform parents of our assessment process during the child's 'settling in' period. We explain to parents
> - why we assess children's learning
> - what we actually assess
> - how we involve parents and children in this process.
>
> As a staff we plan the dates of our parent meetings when the report will be discussed. Alongside this we plan 'folio weeks', once a term, when parents are invited to look at the folio and review progress with their child. The child and family discuss with staff what they would like to take home.

The procedure for reporting is as follows.

- When the time for reporting approaches, we gather together folios, photos, drawings, emerging writing, staff observations, notes from parents conferences. We check there is evidence to support each key aspect of the child's development.

- We then agree who will be responsible for writing reports on each child.

- We run workshops for staff who are writing reports for the first time.

- Parents are told in our newsletter that the reports are being written and we will be seeking their views. This provides an opportunity for many parents who have concerns about information being passed on to the primary school to discuss this with us.

- Before the reports are sent home, we give the child feedback in language they can understand; this encourages them to talk about their learning and celebrate their successes.

- Parents read and sign the reports, adding comments if wished.

- We arrange time to discuss their responses and together set out the next steps in learning. Sometimes we write these on the back of the report, but often we just talk about them.

- Report forms are copied for distribution to receiving primary schools with a 'reminder' note of their next planned liaison visit, when we discuss the reports in detail.

- In the new session we welcome feedback from the primaries on the information in the report.

### Supporting learning at the transition to primary school

The management of effective transitions from nursery to primary 1 will involve:

- nursery/centre and primary staff sharing ideas about their practice, curriculum guidelines and the experiences children will have within each setting.

Reporting should assist this process by ensuring:

- transfer of information which is manageable and useful to primary teachers in taking account of prior learning
- effective parental involvement
- careful assessment and review of each child's learning over the early weeks within the new setting.



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## 5.4 REFLECTION: HOW GOOD IS OUR REPORTING?

In theory we all believe in the importance of highlighting children's strengths in their reports. In practice, when we looked over our completed reports, some of them were less positive than we had intended them to be. As a result we made a number of small changes which really improved the tone of the reports.

Staff should think about the quality of the reporting process in their own centre. As a staff group, they should discuss the following questions to identify the strengths of their reporting and areas that need development.

- Does our reporting process promote partnership and provide useful feedback on the child's development and learning?
  - Do children get regular, positive and constructive feedback on their learning?
  - Is there an ongoing dialogue between parents and staff about learning?
  - Are there effective arrangements for parents' meetings to discuss children's reports? For example, is there sufficient time for discussion? Are folios or examples of children's work used to illustrate comments in the report?
  - Are there good arrangements to discuss reports with primary staff before children start school?
  - Are there good arrangements for transfer of information when a child moves to another centre?

- Does our report:
  - provide families and primary schools with a summary picture of the child's learning in each of the key aspects?
  - show that the writer has a good personal knowledge of the individual child as a learner?
  - emphasise the child's best achievement?
  - encourage motivation through a positive approach?
  - help staff plan the next steps in learning for the child?
  - assist primary schools in taking account of children's prior learning?

- Do parents, other staff in the nursery or centre, primary teachers and other agencies find our reports helpful?

- Do the children understand and take pleasure in their reports?

- Does the report:
  - provide an opportunity for parents and children to contribute or comment?
  - give feedback concisely and without jargon?
  - include a drawing or photograph?

## 5.5 EXAMPLES OF REPORTS

(Extract from East Renfrewshire Council)

*Report for:*

*David Scott at May 26, 1998*

*Child's comment*
*I love reading books and now I'm really good at tidying up at nursery and at home.*

*emotional, personal and social development*

*David plays cooperatively and shares. He is independent in choosing, organising and tidying. Takes the lead with other children. Will persevere in tasks which at first seem difficult. Very caring with other children.*

*communication and language*

*David pays attention to information from adults and expresses his thoughts and feelings well. Has fun with words and enjoys making up stories and knows what a little, author and illustrator is David recognises his own name and others.*

*knowledge and understanding of the world*

*understands mathematical processes such as matching, sorting, counting and grouping. Recognises numbers to 10 and writes 1–10. David investigates and seeks solutions. He cares for living things.*

*physical developmwent and movement*

*David likes to run, climb, throw and catch – and does all of these well. Prefers to use left hand.*

*expressive and aesthetic development*

*Enjoys using instruments to invent music. Investigates and uses a variety of techniques.*

*completed by:* _____

*parent's signature* _____ *date:* _____

*parent's comment:* *We feel that David has benefited enormously from his experience of nursery and look forward to his continuing progress in the years ahead. Thanks.*

*points of action:* *David could be given more opportunities to handle scissors, pencils and crayons to further develop his fine movements in his fingers and hands.*

**Summative report**

**Session** _____ **Rachel** _____ **Date of Birth** _____.

**Emotional, Personal and Social Development**
*Rachel is friendly, happy, helpful and confident in the nursery. She has good concentration, and has confidence in her own work and abilities. Rachel is co-operative and considerate with other children and very co-operative with adults.*

**Physical Development and Movement**
*Rachel is confident in climbing and balancing on large apparatus. She enjoys physical activities both indoors and outdoors. Rachel is competent and confident in fine movements of her fingers and hands. She particularly enjoys these activities.*

**Communication and Language**
*Rachel is attentive to stories, rhymes, information and instructions. She has a good awareness of rhyming words. She enjoys retelling stories, asking questions and taking part in conversations. She enjoys writing her name though does require help to form the letters correctly. She is right-handed with correct pencil hold.*

**Expressive and Aesthetic Development**
*Rachel shows excellent creative skills and participates with enjoyment in painting, drawing, craft and modelling in dough. She listens and responds well to rhythm, songs and is able to use musical instruments. She participates in expressive movement and singing games with enjoyment.*

**Knowledge and Understanding of the World**
*Rachel is able to recognise colour and simple shapes. She has a good understanding of number. She has good awareness of mathematical language of large/small, tall/long/short. Rachel shows competence in solving problems. She has excellent knowledge of her environment, she is inquisitive and understands the properties of materials.*

**Parent's Comments** (what has your child gained from their Nursery experience?)
*I feel that nursery has helped Rachel's confidence as she was quite shy at the beginning.*

**Child's Comment**
*Rachel was asked what she liked to play with best in the nursery. She said: 'Painting. Going down the slide. Playing at the dough table and going outside. Glueing, writing.'*
*She likes playing with Nicole, Robbie and Keir. Her favourite song is 'Baa, Baa, Black Sheep'. Her favourite story is 'Nine Ducks Nine'.*

**Staff signature**_____ **Date**_____

**Parent's signature**_____

# EVALUATING: THE HEART OF EFFECTIVE LEARNING

## 6.1 REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Reflecting on practice is at the heart of making improvements to learning and teaching.

Staff should consider the following questions.

- How happy and confident are children in aspects of their learning?
- What has been successful in children's learning and in staff interactions with children?
- What improvements should be made to improve learning and teaching?
- What do changes in children's learning over time tell us about how effective their learning has been?

Once again, this process will be more effective when staff discuss their perceptions and share their views on the quality of the learning environment.

This kind of reflection should be built into everyday learning and teaching to help staff make changes which promote more effective learning for all children. For example, by changing a resource or the level of staff support, the experience may be made more exciting, challenging or interesting for a group of children. This section focuses on how staff can from time to time evaluate aspects of learning to enhance the quality of future learning and teaching. Examples of this kind of reflection on practice are included in each of the previous sections of this document, that is the sections on planning, staff interaction, recording and reporting.

Evaluation involves taking informed decisions about key aspects of the learning environment based on evidence. Information from evaluation should help to identify future action which will improve the quality of learning and teaching.

More general aspects of provision which impact on learning and teaching, such as parental support for learning or the organisation of resources, will be a focus for evaluation as part of the centre's process of improvement and development planning. This section focuses on evaluation as part of learning and teaching. This regular evaluation of planned learning will be central to the wider process of evaluation.

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## 6.2 KEY IDEAS IN EVALUATION

### Evaluation should be non-threatening

To help promote a process which is non-threatening:

- the focus of the evaluation should clearly relate to improving the quality of children's learning
- staff should be involved in deciding the topic to be evaluated; it should emerge from reflection and discussion
- opportunities for the whole staff to reflect and review should be planned, rather than always emerge from a perceived 'problem'
- evaluation should be concerned with looking forward and taking decisions for improvement.

### Evaluation should be focused

A key area for evaluation as part of learning and teaching will be the success of staff plans in promoting children's development and learning. At the end of each planning block, staff should ask:

- what has been successful in children's learning and in staff interactions with children?
- what did they enjoy, what motivated or excited them, what made them laugh?
- what improvements should be made to improve learning and teaching?
- how are children progressing in what we intended them to learn in each aspect of our short-term plan?
- how well are different groups of children progressing, for example, younger learners, children who need additional support?

Many activities will have gone as expected. Some will need closer examination and might prompt further questions or comments, such as:

- they want to dress up as clowns again soon!
- should we provide more or less intervention in developing role play in the Post Office?
- did I ask too many closed questions when I was trying to extend the children's talk?
- there seems to be too much boisterousness in building with the large construction toys
- I don't think that I am stimulating the children enough at small group time
- Christine is shy, I must try to praise and encourage her whenever she does something well.

More evidence will sometimes need to be gathered before reaching a conclusion. Where changes in practice are agreed, they should be reviewed after a time to make sure that they are working well.

### Evaluation should be systematic

The following ideas may be useful to promote systematic evaluation. Staff can:

- exchange responsibilities for an area of the nursery for a time to provide another view of that area
- observe each other or work in pairs to evaluate an aspect of provision
- use performance indicators, checklists or other criteria as an agreed basis for evaluating an aspect of provision
- gather as evidence samples of children's work, photographs, tape and video recordings and the comments of staff, children and parents.

Evaluation is an ongoing process, fundamental to the process of learning and teaching. Information gathered in evaluation will help staff in taking informed decisions to support children's learning. Evaluation will also mean that any action can be effectively planned to enhance the quality of the learning environment.

Further examples of how to evaluate pre-school provision can be found in *Using Performance Indicators in Nursery School/Class/Pre-Five Unit Self-Evaluation*, SOEID HM Inspectors of Schools, Audit Unit (1995).

**Scottish**
**Consultative**
**Council *on the***
**Curriculum**

*Gardyne Road*
*Broughty Ferry*
*Dundee DD5 1NY*
*Tel: 01382 455053*
*Fax: 01382 455046*

*Email: reception@sccc.ac.uk*
*http://www.sccc.ac.uk/*